DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 571 EA 022 011

AUTHOR Smoley, Eugene, Jr.
TITLE When Adopting a School Is Not Enough: Business Leadership in Reforming Public Education. Cresap Insight.
INSTITUTION Cresap, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Sep 89
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Principles; *Consultants; *Educational Change; Educational Policy; *Education Work Relationship; Elementary Secondary Education; *Public Education; *School Business Relationship; *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS *Partnerships in Education

ABSTRACT

This document discusses the desirability of creating a synergistic business/education relationship. The most pressing problems of urban education and education reform are not conceptual or analytic, but managerial. Dysfunctional public education will affect business in the future because the products of the education system will enter the work force as inadequate human capital. Business must eschew its peripheral, largely philanthropic, involvement with schools for a more whole-hearted commitment to managerial reforms. Mere survival is not enough. Despite a growing consensus on both the problems and the cures, reform efforts in urban schools have largely been ineffective. The problem is a piecemeal approach to proposing solutions. Fundamental reform means clarifying educational mission and getting commitment to it from major stakeholders. The organization must then be structured in a way that will support its mission and not hinder it. All these items are classic management tasks. Policy formation in cities and schools must be reexamined and new models of business involvement must be developed. (MLH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED322571

Cresap Insight

When Adopting a School Is Not Enough: Business Leadership in Reforming Public Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert J. Cornet

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

About Cresap

Cresap is an international management consulting firm that helps chief executives and heads of organizations – including those in the public sector – achieve competitive advantage and improve performance. We provide counsel in the areas of strategy and organizational effectiveness. Our ability to serve clients is enhanced by specific industry expertise.

The critical importance of modern day education has led us to address its problems. To this task, we bring all the skills, techniques and experience we have acquired in:

- helping enterprises in business and industry achieve superior results relative to their competition
- helping the leaders of public school districts, colleges and universities manage their organizations more efficiently and cost-effectively
- working with business and community coalitions formed to revitalize public schools.

Out of this experience, we have formed some conclusions about the desirability of creating a synergy between business and education. These conclusions gave rise to the following, written by Eugene "Chip" Smoley, Jr., a vice president in Cresap's Washington office.

When Adopting a School Is Not Enough...

In attacking the problems of urban education and education reform today, the most pressing issues are not conceptual or analytic. They are managerial. We know what to do. We know why to do it. But we do not know how to get it done.

Because managerial issues are what American business knows best how to resolve, those are the issues in education upon which American business ought now to be focusing its energies and resources.

Over the past decade, business has become more and more involved in public education. It has done so because it has come to see the enormous stake it has in the quality of public education in our cities.

Poor public school education in the cities where businesses are located affects them now because it makes recruitment of managers difficult: employees don't want to live where their children cannot be educated. Dysfunctional public education will affect businesses in the future because the products of the education system will enter the work force as inadequate human capital.

But even with that understanding of its stake in education, much of business's involvement has been on the periphery of education. It has consisted largely of traditional corporate philanthropy, ranging from cash and equipment donations, to such special business education projects as Junior Achievement and Project Business, to Adopt-A-School programs.

As valuable as this involvement has been, it has not put business, and the considerable skills of business persons, at the heart of education reform. And that is where business needs to be, for its own sake and for the sake of public education in America.

If reform were working, then the peripheral involvement of business in education would be fine. But it is not working. Despite the continuing efforts at reform, public education in our cities is still in miserable shape. A 1988 Carnegie Commission report, *An Imperiled Generation: Saving Urban Schools,* says bluntly that the education reform movement of the past five years has not had any significant impact on urban schools.

That lack of impact is not because there is disagreement about the problems of urban education or the programmatic solutions to those problems. Today, there is broad consensus among educators, policy experts and public leaders of every hue in the political spectrum on what is wrong with public education in our cities.

'Survival' Is Not Enough

All too often, students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach. In too many places they have to spend too much time simply trying to survive the day. And too frequently, schools do not have adequate resources, or the right resources – both human and capital – to succeed even at the minimal level of survival. Past sheer survival, too many teachers are uncertain what to teach and too many students are uncertain why they should learn. They feel adrift, isolated and abandoned.

The policy experts and educators also agree on many of the solutions to those problems.

Communities and parents need to be more deeply and legitimately involved in the schools, supportive of students and teachers. Educational purpose and goals need to be clear and adopted by teachers, parents and students alike. Teachers need to be more deeply involved in education policy decision-making. The various functional disciplines of education need to be better integrated. Children need to have access to preschool education such as Project Head Start. Schools have to be safe.

Yet, despite this consensus on the problems and the cures, we still are faced with that sad conclusion by the Carnegie Commission: reform efforts in urban schools have largely been ineffective.

A major reason for the lack of success, as educators and policymakers are coming to see, is that the substantive problems usually have been examined – and their solutions proposed – piecemeal.

They have not been viewed in relation to a managerial system – beginning with individual departments within schools, and extending to the schools, district organizations and state systems – that can either advance reform or keep it from taking place (albeit often unintentionally; it is just the way the system operates).

The connection between substantive reform and managerial effectiveness is clear once we see reform as systemic change.

The Imperatives Of Reform

Reform means changing urban education so that it can more effectively carry out its mission. More fundamentally, reform means clarifying that mission and getting commitment to it from those who have a stake in ensuring its success.

Those are the classic strategic management imperatives of deciding what ought we to do ("what business are we in?") and why ought we to do it ("why is this the right business?").

Once those issues have been decided, then the organization must be structured in a way that will support its mission and not hinder it.

In the case of education reform, we need to understand from a systemic standpoint what is inhibiting change, what resources (human as well as capital) are required to make the change, how current resources are now being used, what systems are necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the resources, to whom the entire system is accountable and how accountability will be enforced.

Again, all those items are classic management tasks.

In our experience, successful school systems carry out these tasks; unsuccessful ones do not.

For instance, there is now wide agreement that one of the most basic measures of school effectiveness is "time on task." The principle is almost tautologically simple: whatever you spend your time doing, that is what will get done.

If "teaching" is the critical task – no matter what one's particular philosophy of education and favorite methodology of teaching might be – then critical amounts of time in school have to be spent on that task.

A reform-minded administration and faculty could try to act on that principle by exhorting each other to "spend more time teaching." But such exhortation is likely to be ineffective. That is cheerleading, not managing.

What is more likely to be effective is for the school to go through the management process of finding out, first, how time is actually spent by administrators, teachers and students.

The Public School Forum of North Carolina undertook such a study in 1987, when teams of educators and business leaders analyzed working conditions in the public schools. The teams interviewed school personnel and reviewed the detailed logs of some 450 teachers, principals and office staff to see how they actually spent their time.

They found that teachers spent only about half their time actually instructing and counseling students, and principals spent less than 30 percent of their time planning instructional goals and observing and evaluating staff. Clearly, both teachers and administrators were spending insufficient "time on task."

That is not a moral judgment on the individual faculty and administrators. It is an observation about a management system. The organizational system that had been allowed to develop in the schools had

so structured faculty time that teachers and principals could not spend enough of it on instructional tasks and spent too much on noninstructional matters.

The management task in the schools was not to exhort faculty to spend more time teaching. The management task was to redesign the system so that teachers and administrators could spend the time where they needed to – in support of the mission of the schools.

To those familiar with business management, all this is old hat. They know that organizations don't work unless they are systemically structured to work. They know that managing means paying attention to, and working on, those systems.

But for many people within school systems, this is not old hat. Very few of them, even experienced and well-educated administrators, have been trained in modern management theory and practice. It is simply not the natural way for them to look at what is going on in their schools.

Furthermore, there is little likelihood that the "governance system" of school policy-making, as it presently exists in most cities, will foster an examination of the management structure of schools.

School policy is largely determined by school boards made up of local citizens. While this system ought to encourage community involvement in

schools (and often actually does), it does have difficulty dealing with issues of school effectiveness.

In part, the difficulties come from the political nature of school boards and community boards. As power centers – though the power is often not great compared with that of other political bodies – school boards may sometimes make policy that is based more on the power distribution within a community than the desire for education improvement. Administrative positions, for instance, may be awarded for political reasons, rather than on the basis of the most effective deployment of human resources.

Such policies are a continuing concern in regard to the community school boards in New York City (separate from the concern over allegations of out-and-out corruption in some of those boards).

But even when local boards remain focused on education issues, they seldom address the management aspects of public education. That is because, as in the case of school administrators, the people who serve on school boards rarely have management training or experience. They simply do not look at schools from a management perspective.

The one constituency of schools who could help the most in addressing this central, systemic problem of management effectiveness – business leaders – has, in the main, stayed away from involvement in school policy. Ironically, more often than not they have felt unqualified to take a direct part in running our urban school systems.

Business Leaders Must Become Involved

But if education reform is to work, then business leaders need to do more than just get involved. They need to take a leading role in helping their communities address the management issues of urban education.

Involvement could take many forms – from current programs of volunteerism to seeking election to school boards. But the greatest leverage for change can come from an independent, community-wide effort, initiated through a community organization such as a chamber of commerce.

The effort would take the form of a blue-ribbon panel or study commission empowered to undertake a thorough examination of the management structure and practices of a city's public education system. Working with the local school district administration, the panel would also be empowered to make recommendations for changes in the management system and to review progress on those changes.

As a vehicle to focus the total community's attention on education reform through management reform, the panel would include not only business leaders, but also members of community organizations, unions, teachers, parents and administrators. In short, it would include representatives of all those who have a stake in public education within a community.

This kind of community-based intervention, spearheaded by business leaders who understand the managerial issues, has the best chance of breaking the cycle of well-intended education reform being frustrated and defeated by inadequate or dysfunctional management systems.

The model of business leadership is documented in a recent Rand report for six school districts, *Educational Progress: Cities Mobilized to Save Their Schools*, January 1989. That experience argues that this kind of effort can bring about change in any urban school system – provided that those in the community with the power – and the knowledge -- to make change are involved. Even in the experience of these six cities, however, the emphasis on management change is lacking.

Another model for managerial change in urban school systems is now being tested in New Jersey. In this case, the state Department of Education declared – on legitimate grounds – that a school district was ineffective. The department mandated a management study and used the result of this study to initiate management change in the school district. In a court test, the state has been upheld and is proceeding to restructure the district.

That is a draconian measure, though understandable and necessary when local school districts and the communities they serve do not or cannot voluntarily put their own houses in order. Nonetheless, it is a top-down, externally imposed change mechanism. As business leaders know from their own experience, change that comes from the bottom-up -- that is, self-initiated – is the most powerful, effective and long-lasting.

If that is the kind of change we in business want to see in our schools, then we ourselves must lead it.

© 9/89 Towers Perrin

Cresap

a Towers Perrin company

Atlanta
Brussels
Chicago
Dallas
Frankfurt
Houston
London
Los Angeles
Melbourne
Milan
Munich
New York
Paris
Providence
San Francisco
Sydney
Toronto
Washington